

Welcome to Kuala Lumpur

*Imagine a city, its skyline
punctuated by minarets, Mogul-style
domes and skyscrapers, its colourful,
food-stall-lined streets shaded by a
leafy canopy of banyan trees*

Multicultural Modernity

Kuala Lumpur (KL), Malaysia's sultry capital is packed with historic monuments, steel-clad skyscrapers, lush parks, mega malls, bustling street markets and lively nightspots. An essential part of the vibrant mix are the incense-wreathed, colourfully adorned mosques and temples of the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities. Reverence for these ancient cultures is balanced with a drive toward the contemporary world, evident from the exciting contemporary-art and design scene, an ambitious riverbank-regeneration project and cutting-edge architecture.

Historical Canvas

Today's KLites are separated by only a few generations from the Chinese and Malay tin prospectors who founded the city. By the time the British made it the capital of Peninsular Malaysia in the late 19th century, erecting grand colonial buildings, KL had only been in existence for a few decades. The city has since been the scene of history-defining moments for Malaysia. Stadium Merdeka was where, in 1957, the country's first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, punched his fist seven times in the air and declared independence.

Shoppers' Paradise

Join locals in two of their favourite past-times: shopping and eating. Malaysian consumer culture achieves its zenith in KL, where you could spend all day browsing glitzy air-conditioned malls such as Pavilion Kuala Lumpur, Suria KLCC and Mid Valley Megamall in search of designer fashion and bargains. Bangsar and Publika are the places to go for lesser-known labels and the work of offbeat independent designers. Alternatively, explore Central Market for locally made handicrafts and hunt out the few remaining artisans and antiques dealers still keeping shop in and around Chinatown.

Street Feast

Despite the heat, this is a city best explored on foot. Walk and you can catch all the action and save yourself the frustration of becoming entangled in one of KL's all-too-frequent traffic jams. You'll be sure to come across some of the city's best dining spots: the hawker stalls and traditional neighborhood *kopitiam* (coffee shops) that beckon you over with the aroma of freshly cooked food.

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Why I Love Kuala Lumpur

By Isabel Albiston, Writer

For such a frenetic city, KL has an uncanny way of charming its visitors. Of course, the food helps: the sheer variety of delicious dining options that reflect the very best of Malaysian cuisine. But it's more than that. It's the way the city has embraced modernity with its towering skyscrapers and technological connectivity, all the while retaining a deeply entrenched adherence to the traditional customs and religions of its residents. Beyond the traffic and malls lies a complex cultural patchwork formed of distinct, coexisting communities, united by the warm welcome they extend to guests.

For more about our writers, see p264.